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ABSTRACT

Common-sense proposals for restructuring schools neglect two major issues: What content is needed to give direction to structural innovation? and How can the many factors that influence this content be linked? A discussion of the social context of U.S. education demonstrates the ways in which content and linkage problems are complicated. An agenda of content for teacher commitment and competence is described, based on the following areas: depth of understanding and authentic knowledge; success for all students; new teacher roles; and the concept of schools as moral communities. Four areas of need for substantial change are identified: high standards; high incentives and stakes; local empowerment; and collaborative organization. Five problems related to systemic linkage that restructuring "theory" has yet to address are discussed--the failure to explain: how organizational alignment will be achieved; how powerful institutions will change; how the contradiction between externally developed standards and local empowerment will be addressed; how citizenry will be convinced to generate funds; and how building social capital in the society will be accomplished. Twenty-six endnotes are attached. (63 references) (LMI)

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Beyond Common Sense in Educational Restructuring: The Issues of Content and Linkage

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Abstract

Common sense proposals for restructuring schools neglect two major issues: what content is needed to give educational direction to the structures, and how can the many factors that influence this content be linked? The article proposes an agenda of content for teacher commitment and competence, and it identifies five problems related to systemic linkage that restructuring "theory" has yet to address.

"Restructuring" in education refers to multiple ideas and strategies. The term lacks a single, commonly accepted definition, but among the many proposals for action, important common themes have emerged. These suggest major changes in students' learning experiences, in the professional life of teachers, in the governance and management of schools, and in the ways in which schools are held accountable.[1] Many of the proposals seem reasonable, and supported in some cases with empirical evidence. But considering the magnitude of changes proposed, the failures of previous reforms, and the undeveloped state of theory on educational restructuring, it is important to interrogate the proposals. First, what is the common sense theoretical basis for expecting restructuring efforts to improve education for students? The implied "theory" behind many proposals seems grounded largely on the assumption that new organizational structures will increase either the commitment or the competence of teachers and students. As we shall see, however, this assumption leads to a second question: what particular kinds of commitments and competence should the new structures produce, or what is the content of restructuring? Answers to this question generate yet another: how will the multiple organizations and factors that affect schooling be linked or coordinated to produce the desired commitments and competencies? Posing these questions helps both to identify gaps in the common sense theory of educational restructuring and to initiate reflection on how to fill them.

How Will Structural Changes Help?
Hopes for Commitment and Competence

Alarm over the condition of public education, expressed most visibly by political and corporate leaders, has focused attention on a variety of proposed changes in organizational structure:[2]

- Parents should choose their children's schools, and schools should compete for funding based on student enrollment.
- Individual schools should have autonomy from district and state regulations in basic decisions on curriculum, hiring and budget.
- Teachers and parents should share decision making authority with administrators in local school governance.
- Schools should be held accountable for student performance by districts, states, and parents.
- Tracking and ability grouping should be abolished and replaced by heterogeneous grouping.
- Schools should operate year-round.
- Community social services should be coordinated with school programs.

- There should be national certification of teachers and ladders of professional advancement within the teaching profession.

- There should be more opportunity for teachers to plan and work together in school.

- Students should spend more time in small group and individual study, less in large group instruction.

- Students should advance in school not according to grades attended and credits earned, but according to demonstrated proficiency.

Enormous energy and resources have been invested in debates over and attempts to implement changes of this sort.

Why should changes like these be expected to improve students' education? Literature on educational restructuring offers no thorough theoretical explanation. To understand the connections between organizational structure and student outcomes, we must instead try to infer the assumed relationships. These inferences constitute common sense theory, and they can usually be reduced to two types of claims. New organizational structures will presumably either increase the commitment (motivation) of adults to teach and students to learn, or they will increase the competence (technical capacity) of adults to offer a better learning environment.[3] Two examples illustrate this reasoning.

Local Autonomy, Discretion and Control. If teachers and administrators are given more autonomy, discretion and control in conducting their work, they will feel a greater sense of ownership of and responsibility for its quality. This control leads to more pride in success and more personal culpability for failure, both of which inspire greater commitment to do a good job. According to this reasoning, structures such as site-based management, school improvement teams, or curriculum and test development by local teachers might each be expected to enhance commitment.

Increased control allows teachers to use their professional knowledge and experience to the fullest. Rather that having to rely on technical direction from authorities far removed from the scene, the teacher is free to conduct practice only according to approaches that his/her best judgment says will work. Access to and application of technical know-how is thus made more efficient. In this sense, local empowerment can be expected to enhance the technical capacity of teachers.

Collaborative Communities. A common approach to restructuring is to create small communities (teams, families, divisions) of teachers and students who stay together over an extended period (2 years or more) to offer a comprehensive instructional program. Having face-to-face contact for most of the day in most subjects and realizing that the relationships will continue far beyond a semester or a year, students and teachers have more opportunities

to develop trust and personal bonding. That is, the more comprehensive arenas for interaction and the extended time period induce students and teachers to depend more upon one another for personal efficacy, growth and worth. This generates higher stakes incentives for each party to make the relationship work. Thus, commitment to both teaching and learning increase.

Extended forms of interaction also increase the information that teachers have about students: the way students think and feel, their unique personal backgrounds, their academic strengths and weaknesses, what interests and bores them. Students learn a lot more about their teachers as well. Enhanced personal information increases the possibilities of effective communication. Extended contact with the student gives the teacher more opportunity and incentive to try different approaches. This yields more comprehensive diagnostic information which allows the teacher to reach more valid conclusions about what works best in instruction. In this way increased sense of community and trust fortify teaching competence or technical capacity.

Other changes in organizational structure such as school choice, cooperative learning, heterogeneous classes, mentoring (of students and teachers), on-the-job staff development, high stakes accountability, or linking the school more closely with community resources (businesses, social service agencies) are also likely to be defended through arguments that anticipate increasing either the commitment or the competence of teachers and students.

The arguments make sense, but in spite of these presumptions, new organizational structures alone are unlikely to improve education. New structures may be necessary, but they are insufficient to ensure either the general enhancement of commitment or competence or the enhancement of specific kinds of commitment and competence. Examples illustrate this point as well.[4]

Site-Based Management. Site-based management has been launched by district or state policies which establish local school councils of teachers, parents, and school administrators. These organizations permit school participants to exercise formal authority over school affairs dealing with curriculum, staff, and budget. Under a variety of circumstances, however, such decentralized authority would not be expected to enhance teacher commitment.[5] Parents could attempt to narrow rather than widen teachers' professional discretion. The district could fail to provide sufficient release time for teachers to participate meaningfully in governance, and these increased responsibilities could lead to burnout. Conflict within the council or inadequate funding for needed programs could lead to disillusionment and cynicism.

A site-based management structure, even if it avoids these problems and inspires energetic commitment, gives no assurance that the commitment will be exercised toward any particular educational vision. A council could work hard for highly traditional or for progressive forms of education. It could structure its program to serve either the most advantaged or disadvantaged students. It could favor specific vocational training over liberal

arts. It could insist on curriculum which celebrated either multicultural experience or primarily Western European culture. In short, organizational structure provides no particular educational content.

Teaming. Consider a middle or high school structure in which a team of four teachers work with 100 students in a "family" group that stays together for two years. Teachers have special planning time to function as a team to improve curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment. Although the structure offers much opportunity for exchange of information, there are several circumstances in which the structure would not nurture increased teaching competence. A common problem is poor leadership within the team or the school. Teams may use planning time mainly to complain about individual students, to attend to administrative details, or to discuss curriculum no more deeply than choosing a general theme for study (the environment, culture, estimation). If the family and team structure is to elevate technical competence, participants need more than time together. In addition, teachers need access to resources that stimulate a substantive focus on issues of curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment.[6]

The school's mission could also limit the power of the team to enhance teaching competence. If teachers are required to pursue a set of multiple, diffuse, perhaps even contradictory educational goals, which is common in schools that try to accommodate a large variety of interests, then most of the team's time together will be occupied with reaching compromises about what topics to include and to exclude from the curriculum. In a school plagued with multiple, competing goals, conflict about what ought to be taught can drive out careful consideration about how to teach any given subject well.

The Issues of Content and Linkage

The illustrations show that new organizational structures may be necessary, but not sufficient to improve education.[7] Something else is needed to guide human energy in productive educational directions. The "something else" is a set of particular commitments and competencies to guide practice. Is the point of restructuring to provide a better way of teaching the current curriculum to students who haven't learned it? Or is the goal to fundamentally change, for all students, what is taught and how it is taught? How much of a core curriculum should be required of all students, and what should it be? How much attention should be given to high- vs low-performing students? To what extent should teachers take on new functions beyond the teaching of specialized subjects? Answers to such questions delineate the content that guides activity within organizational structures and that ultimately reflects the quality of education. "Content" in this sense involves far more than curriculum topics; it includes a broad range values, beliefs, and competencies expressed by teachers, administrators and other staff. In short, content is the substance that both guides the use of and is influenced by organizational form.

From this perspective, the central issue is not simply how to change from centralized to decentralized systems, from large classes to small, from tracking to heterogeneous

grouping, from teacher as individual to teacher as team member, from principal as autocrat to principal as democrat. Instead the issue is how structures can support the building of solid programmatic focus for teachers, administrators, parents and students. Drawing from restructuring literature, I suggest later an agenda for teacher commitment and competence that helps to define content for restructuring.

Conceiving an agenda of powerful content for a single teacher for a single class is much easier than actually cultivating those commitments and competencies. Teachers' commitments and skills are influenced by previous educational training, by available curriculum materials and tests, by opportunities for staff development, and by working conditions in the school. Can the diverse agencies and people which affect teachers ever be sufficiently linked or aligned to cultivate the "right" set of commitments and competencies? Even if we could find ways of linking teacher preparation, staff development, curriculum, and assessment to help some teachers, could these be replicated and managed to be simultaneously infused, in sufficiently flexible and adaptive ways into several classes, schools, districts or states? Research has shown the difficulties of developing agreement and coordination between classes and teachers within schools.[8] The problem becomes more complex if one seeks common standards for powerful content across several schools. How to link important influences in the system to help individual teachers and how then to link classes within schools and schools within larger units is another serious frontier that common sense thinking about restructuring has yet to cross.[9]

Before addressing the content and linkage problems directly, it is important to recognize that the social context of education in the United States complicates their resolution. The content and linkage issues are particularly troublesome because of persisting tension in the United States over the goals of education. Awareness of some of the dilemmas over goals should help to inform the quest for content and linkage in education restructuring.

Education Goals

The U.S. Department of Education (1990) has issued six goals for the nation approved by the National Governors Association, but substantial tension and disagreement remains over what to teach, the extent to which there should be one set of goals for all students, and who should make decisions about goals. A full discussion of each of these issues is beyond the scope of this paper. To illustrate the relevance of disagreement on goals to restructuring theory, I consider only the first two: namely, what vision(s) or conception(s) of education should be promoted, and how much variation should there be within the society in educational content. Conflict on these matters fuels controversy over the third: who should have control over education goals.

Traditional and Progressive Educational Visions

Disagreement over educational goals is due in part to long-standing issues in educational philosophy that are unlikely to be resolved even with societal agreement that schools should be improved, that students should come to school ready to learn, or that all students should have more science and mathematics. The most publicized debates highlight issues such as the importance given to science versus humanities, vocational versus college prep curriculum, or programs for gifted vs students at-risk. A less publicized, less articulated, but more fundamental debate often centers around a set of apparently competing choices between traditional and progressive visions of education. In all curriculum areas, these visions harbor conflicting assumptions about the nature of knowledge and its use in education. Some of these assumptions which have major implications for curriculum and teaching practice are summarized below.[10]

Traditional

1. Knowledge as conclusive and objective.
2. Education for surveys of knowledge and basic skills.
3. Absorption of knowledge for future use.
4. Knowledge grounded in formal disciplines external to the learner.
5. Education for verbal and mathematical competence.

Progressive

1. Knowledge as tentative and socially constructed.
2. Education for in-depth understanding and critical thinking.
3. Using knowledge in order to learn.
4. Knowledge grounded in interaction between student experiences and formal disciplined knowledge.
5. Education for multiple intelligences.

This is not to suggest that people take clear, categorical positions on these issues, or that it is always necessary to choose between the stark alternatives. What makes the issues so persistent is that each side of the coin contains enough truth that it cannot be completely dismissed. Disagreement over goals in these terms will never be conclusively resolved on one side or the other. Instead, opposing sides will continue as horns of persisting dilemmas for thoughtful educators. The historical record shows that school reform movements have pushed in both traditional and progressive directions, but that traditional visions have consistently dominated. Progressive visions have been tolerated only occasionally as alternatives for special groups of students.[11] But rhetoric in the restructuring movement suggests that the contemporary effort to articulate powerful content will entail renewed struggle over how much to emphasize one side at the possible expense of the other. When seen as dilemmas, the challenge is to craft structures that stimulate thoughtful use of the strengths in both traditional and progressive visions.

Differentiation and Commonality in Curriculum

In spite of recent movement toward national education goals and increased large scale testing that imply increased uniformity in curriculum, several forces push toward differentiation, both of student experiences within schools and of schools from one another. The forces that drive differentiation are cultural, vocational, pedagogical, and political.

Rapidly increasing numbers of racially and ethnically diverse students and of students without English as a first language have raised, and will continue to raise questions about what should be taught in common and what educational content should be different to respond to needs of unique cultural groups.

There are increasing pressures to design education into different career tracks. Even with agreement that the workforce needs more advanced competencies in thinking and problem-solving and more education beyond secondary school, clear divisions in academic preparation exist between students aiming for elite liberal arts institutions, state universities, community colleges, and technical schools. Oregon has adopted a system that accentuates such differentiation after 10th grade.

Research and experience in teaching continues to highlight individual differences in student motivation and learning style, accentuated even further by dramatic differences in students' cultural backgrounds and home environments. In the face of these differences, teachers are increasingly reluctant to shape all students into one mold.

One way of handling human diversity and disagreement over educational ends or means is to allow individuals, schools, communities, and states to choose their own paths, rather than requiring uniformity. Resistance to formal centralized control of curriculum in the United States has bolstered a tradition of local control. Individual schools, districts, states, and parents united through neighborhood or common interests have exercised unique influences over school curriculum which leads to further differentiation in the nation as a whole.

Significant tension exists between the differentiation of schooling due to cultural diversity, vocational specialization, individual differences and local political control, and the desire for standard, more uniform outcomes across a large number of schools. The case for more uniform standards is based largely in arguments for equity for all students regardless of social background and residential location, for more efficient assessment of results, and for increasing student achievement on a state or national scale.

Discussion of education goals within a school or a unit containing more than one school (district, state, nation) is likely, therefore, to involve difficulties not only on the substance of education to pursue (e.g. along traditional or progressive lines), but also in deciding which goals should be common to all students (schools) and which should be

different. Literature on organizational and school effectiveness emphasizes the importance of consensus on goals, but neither specific proposals for educational restructuring nor the implicit theories behind them explain how consensus on these two dimensions of goal conflict will be reached. Greater societal consensus on these goal issues would make it much easier to specify the content for structures to promote and how to link the diverse organizations that shape that content.[12]

How to reach productive societal consensus on education goals is beyond the scope of this analysis. The point is to realize that proposals for organizational change in schooling must be seen at least in part as attempts to cope with these tensions. The following agenda for commitment and competence, while drawn from restructuring literature, will not resolve fundamental social dispute over educational goals.

Powerful Content: An Agenda for Commitment and Competence

What kinds of commitments and competence should new organizational structures nurture? A comprehensive look at the kinds of commitments and competence needed would consider administrators, parents, publishers, test-makers, and others. I focus here on teachers, because they have the most direct opportunities to influence students. The four themes discussed next represent, in my view, the most important new forms of commitment and competence for teachers. The themes appear in general analyses of restructuring and in a number of restructuring projects.[13]

Theme 1: Depth of Understanding and Authentic Learning. To infuse restructuring with powerful content calls first for teacher commitment to an educational vision that emphasizes depth of understanding and authentic learning, rather than only transmission and reproduction of declarative knowledge. This emphasis on the progressive vision does not deny, as many erroneously believe, the importance of teaching basic information, concepts and skills. The point is to move beyond the "basics," recognizing that unless such knowledge is applied to questions more complex than those of quiz shows or crossword puzzles, it will rarely be useful to individuals or society.

To execute the commitment, teachers will need lots of help. Teaching subject matter in depth and in authentic ways is not easy. We have learned from research on student cognition and student engagement that students' perspectives must be taken more seriously in the design of curriculum and the practice of teaching. This tends to suggest a student-centered approach. We have also learned that students are more capable of complex thought than commonly assumed, but that they are rarely challenged to understand academic content in depth. Many voices urge curriculum reform in the direction of more challenging content."[14] These raised expectations for student understanding of disciplined knowledge suggest the need for more rigorous, subject-centered standards.

How can challenging content be taught within a student-centered approach? The answer cannot be found simply by shifting to new methods of instruction such as computers

and electronic media, cooperative groupwork, individually-paced study, or by replacing worksheets with projects, debates, hands-on experiments, or creative writing. It will require deeper understanding by teachers of the subjects they teach, greater awareness of students' preconceptions of the subjects, and efforts to generate thoughtful interaction between formal disciplines and student experience. Some of the "new pedagogies" can help, but these processes alone do not define what should be taught or the degree of depth desired.

We are in the difficult situation of recognizing that the substantive foundation for restructuring must be curriculum and instruction aimed more toward depth of understanding and authentic learning, but realizing also that this emergent vision of education has not been developed in enough detail nor experienced by enough people to compete with traditional forms. How to build teacher commitment and competence in this direction is a major challenge.

Theme 2: Success for All Students. Proponents of restructuring emphasize the importance of high educational success, not only for the small proportion of the population that has traditionally succeeded in school, but for all students. Some of the most visible arguments are based on claims about the need for high skills throughout the economy.[15] Familiar structures of schooling seem to have responded well to students who come to school eager to learn, competent in speaking English, from home environments that provide food, health care, intellectual stimulation, emotional stability, and the belief that working hard in school will lead to economic success and full fledged membership in adult, middle class society. Students who buy into and succeed in conventional schooling cause fewer visible problems, but national tests, international comparisons, and testimony from employers indicate that even the most successful students are often unable to use their minds well.

The failure of the educational system is most evident for the escalating population of students who don't fit the mold described above. Instead, poverty, poor health, emotional turmoil, limited proficiency in English, increased responsibilities for family care, cultural norms that differ from the white middle class, and histories of failure in school make it very difficult for children to invest themselves in conventional forms of schoolwork.[16] These students pose major challenges, especially to teachers from white, middle class backgrounds. When students don't seem to learn within the conventional structure of schools, teachers begin to lower their expectations. As children experience failure, they lower expectations for themselves. This creates a self-fulfilling downward spiral for both students and staff.

Some of the problems of students at-risk will be solved ultimately only through massive efforts to build social capital.[17] But schools cannot and need not wait. Research has shown that teachers with high expectations for at-risk students can improve their chances of success, and that students from culturally diverse backgrounds can be taught effectively.[18] As teachers participate in such new organizational structures as teams, school councils, or student advisory groups, critical attention must be given to the second arena for powerful content: building commitment and competence to teach all students, especially those from culturally diverse backgrounds and with histories of school failure. White middle class

teachers, for example, will need to gain new understanding of students' diverse cultural and social backgrounds. They will need opportunities to get to know these students better through working relationships that nurture the kind of personal bonding and trust on which mutual commitment to teach and to learn must be built. They will need to develop understanding of important competencies that these students possess but may not be able to express through conventional school routines.

Theme 3: New Roles for Teachers. Themes 1 and 2 suggest that teachers may need to function in new roles that depart substantially from the familiar role of pedagogue within a self-contained class, teaching many students simultaneously in a large group. Restructuring projects suggest a variety of new roles for teachers, including instructional coach, instructional or curriculum team member, facilitator of new programs, student advisor, and participant in organizational decision-making. These roles extend the responsibilities of teaching enormously and call for a host of commitments and competencies.

Will teachers commit themselves to new responsibilities? Will they be able to function competently in the new roles? There is no reason to assume that simply placing teachers in the new roles of coach, organizational decision-maker, or even team member with other teachers, will necessarily build commitment or proficiency to perform the role well.[19] Most teachers have had little experience and no formal training in these roles. As indicated in theme 1, the knowledge base on how to be effective in some of these roles is weak. There is a danger that, as with other innovations, new roles become overplayed as ends in themselves without critical examination of their necessity and relevance to improved instruction. There may be an important trade-off, for example, between helping teachers become better decision-makers on governance issues versus helping them learn how to respond more constructively to student writing. This third theme calls for critical analysis of what new roles are needed and reinforcement for and education in the roles that new structures require.[20]

Theme 4: Schools as Moral Communities. At first glance, the first three themes in this agenda would seem to call for extensive programs in staff development to train individual teachers in the commitments and competencies described. One might imagine teachers attending a host of courses, workshops, and institutes focused on the three themes. This may be necessary and useful, but programs oriented exclusively toward improvement of individual teachers (pre- or in-service) tend to neglect the more fundamental problem of building a school culture that supports students and staff in the difficult quest for more powerful educational content. The challenge here is to focus not simply on the qualities of individuals, but also on the qualities desired for the school as an organization.

Unfortunately, the dominant discourse of educational reform is technical, functional, and individualistic: the task is to deliver many diverse services to students so that each will eventually contribute to national productivity, exercise full choice in personal consumption, and make prudent, socially responsible decisions in personal and civic affairs. Similarly, discourse on professionalization of teaching emphasizes providing each teacher with

continuing technical training, new standards of competence, opportunities to advance to higher status roles within teaching, and the authority for discretion and empowerment in the conduct of one's daily work. This orientation has deep roots in modern Western philosophy, religion, economics and politics. It has led to designing schools as corporate, rational bureaucracies, and conceiving their missions as analogous to shopping malls, restaurants, clinics, or private clubs where the main purpose of the organization is to serve individual, private needs and wants.[21]

In spite of well-intentioned goals for human betterment, individualistic bureaucracies tend to breed alienation that suppresses learning and creative spirit. Professionalization and division of labor organized around increasingly specialized human needs (e.g. counseling, health, athletics, the many different subjects of study, discipline) tend to fragment experience and isolate people from one another. A preoccupation with competitive performance and with administrative efficiency sanctifies a functionalism and instrumentalism that undermines an ethic of cooperative care. Programs and services aimed primarily toward individuals deflect attention from the collective good of the larger community. The overall effect of these typical tendencies of modern organizations in schools is to weaken both teachers' and students' investment in the constructive use of mind.[22]

If young students are to sustain engagement in learning and if their teachers are to seriously explore fundamental changes in practice, each needs the support and challenge provided by a moral community. A moral community communicates a vision of human dignity and the public good that transcends the pursuit of individual interest, competence and choice. A moral community offers high expectations, opportunities for success, reliable support and an ethic of care for its members to meet the challenges. A moral community provides an agenda of activities that builds collective meaning and commitment to the community itself, apart from its official educational service to individual members. Examples of efforts to build moral community in schools include "families" of teachers and students that stay together for two or more years, and professional development programs which support team projects to benefit departments, grade levels or the school as a whole.[23]

In designing programs and structures aimed at depth of understanding, success for all students, and new roles for teachers, reformers should to think about how to fashion schools into moral communities, and then, how these, in turn, could help to reinforce the needed commitments and competence. The first three themes on the agenda for powerful content are well represented in restructuring literature, but there is far less recognition of this fourth challenge: building commitment and competence, not according to conventional ways of delivering staff development, but instead within schools that are simultaneously trying to transform themselves into moral communities.

I have identified four areas of teacher commitment and competence that can give direction to structural innovation. This particular agenda can certainly be disputed. But without a content agenda of this sort, there is little reason to believe that structural changes

such as school councils, teaching teams, student advisee groups, or cooperative learning would have any particular effect on students or teachers.

The crux of the argument thus far has been to urge that structural changes be undertaken to institute a content agenda voiced in restructuring literature, but not emphasized consistently enough. Is it reasonable to expect organizational structure to generate powerful content for teachers? The case for school restructuring might better be made in the reverse: if educators possessed the new commitments and competencies, they would insist upon new organizational settings in which to practice their craft. From this point of view, the challenge is first to recruit or to educate teachers, administrators, parents in the agenda of powerful content. Structures would then be changed only along the lines required by the newly competent education workers, rather than by policies which assume that across-the-board organizational changes will generate the individual commitments and competence needed to improve teaching and learning.

In their extremes, each of these positions is naive. Organizational structures alone cannot generate commitment and competence in desired directions unless they are staffed by at least some people who already possess the vision and are capable of leading. On the other hand, if schools had to postpone structural changes until most staff demonstrated the desired commitments and competencies, in the interim it would be hard to retain competent staff, and this would undermine the long-term effort. The most reasonable strategy is to work on both fronts at once: pursue organizational restructuring in ways that celebrate the content agenda, while simultaneously educating future teachers, administrators and parents to support it. On each front, the challenge is to keep focused on the content agenda, not mere structural change, as the ultimate goal. What will it take to help teachers, not just in a few schools, but throughout a large district, state or the nation to move in these directions? To answer the question we need to think systemically and to confront the linkage problem.

The Linkage Problem

Factors that Influence Teachers' Commitments and Competencies

If policy is to be designed to affect teachers' commitments and competencies, it should begin with an awareness of the variety of factors that affect them. Each of the following can exert powerful influence:

- Pre-service college-university education
- Criteria for teacher licensing
- In-service staff development
- School, district, and state curriculum guidelines

- Texts and curriculum materials
- Tests for students - local, state, and national
- Criteria for teacher evaluation
- Expectations within the school culture

Currently these parts of the education system are not formally linked to focus on any particular content agenda. If all these influences could be controlled and aligned to focus on the proposed agenda of commitment and competence, this would infuse powerful content into new organizational structures. Restructuring theory should offer ideas on how this might happen.[24]

The prospect of tighter alignment among disparate parts of the system may be alarming to those who see this as a step toward monolithic control. A high degree of systemic management, especially on a national scale, may be opposed as a threat to academic freedom and a potential violation of the freedom of individuals, families, and local communities to pursue unique education goals. An argument can also be made that the effort to manage such a complex system efficiently is both arrogant and ill-informed, for history illustrates a limited ability to manage complex human affairs wisely. An effort to manage the diverse parts of the education system more tightly could create even more serious problems. These concerns are important, but they should not stifle efforts to address the linkage problem.

Taking the above factors seriously involves understanding how to change what happens in schools of education, state departments of education, staff development and school consulting firms; professional education organizations; school district offices, school boards, curriculum publishing companies, test development firms, and individual schools. The behavior of each of these organizations is the result of a complex interplay of political, economic, and social dynamics. How to change any particular organization is complex, and how to change several simultaneously in ways that align different parts of the education system is even more problematic. What wisdom has the restructuring movement offered on this problem?

Theories of Linkage in Education Restructuring

In the abundant research and commentary on educational change I have found no theory which adequately explains both how to change all the separate agencies that influence education and how to link them to have more cumulative impact. Much of the restructuring literature concentrates instead on the merits of specific strategies mentioned at the beginning of the paper (site-based management, school choice, teacher career ladders, parental involvement, shared decision-making, cooperative learning, abolition of tracking). Although the numerous strategies have not been synthesized into a grand theory, their separate

rationales, both explicit and implied, seem grounded in a smaller set of key ideas about the processes of change and linkage. I notice four prominent ideas that may constitute a loose theory about what is needed to make substantial changes in the current education system, either by changing existing schools or starting new ones. These, along with the proposed agenda for powerful content, might be considered building blocks of a common sense theory of educational restructuring.[25]

High Standards. Students' and teachers' mediocre performance can be attributed in part to low expectations and inadequate standards. Thus, a major theme of restructuring is to elevate the standards. Efforts to design new state and national tests, national curriculum standards in the subject areas, national standards for teacher certification, and national education goals illustrate the assumption that explicitly formulated high standards on a state or national basis are necessary to motivate individuals and organizations to improve.

High Incentives/High Stakes. A second assumption is that standards must be backed up by more powerful incentives and sanctions. If educators (and students) face more significant consequences for student success and failure, educators (and students) will work harder for students' success. Strategies bolstered by this reasoning include voucher and school choice plans, bonuses for schools or threat of takeover by the state, publication of school report cards, student employment tied to grades and test results, teacher merit pay or evaluation tied to student performance, and special grants to schools or other groups (teachers within schools, new school development organizations) that initiate new models of schooling. To attract and retain more qualified educators, higher incentives such as increased teacher salaries, career ladders, and alternative routes to certification have been proposed.

Local Empowerment. According to restructuring logic, high standards and more powerful incentives to meet them are necessary, but not sufficient. The people most essential to a school's success, especially the school's professional staff and parents, must have enough control over the organization to develop a sense of ownership. People at the school site must have enough freedom and discretion to operate the school according to their best judgments about how to educate their students. The attempt to empower key players closest to the instruction of students is most evident in strategies such as site-based management, shared decision-making, school choice, and deregulation. The initial examples of this paper explained why local empowerment could be expected to enhance both commitment and technical capacity.

If taken alone and in an extreme form that puts school autonomy above all other values, the principle of local school empowerment would seem to undermine effective linkages among the many organizations that affect schooling. In reality, however, other values such as the growth and development of children and their economic advancement in society at large can align school goals with educational organizations beyond schools. Theoretically, the treasuring of local autonomy is, therefore, tempered by commitment to

student success in a larger interdependent social system. Presumably this permits simultaneous support of local school empowerment along with the provision of standards, incentives, and resources for schools from agencies beyond them. This theoretical compatibility of local empowerment with societal linkage can, of course, breakdown when high/stakes directives from external sources clearly violate local commitments.

Collaborative Organization. Experience and research in organizational productivity shows that it is not enough simply to devolve power from distant central authorities to local organizations. In addition, schools and units within them must move away from highly specialized, hierarchical forms in which individuals work in relative isolation. Instead, workers should work cooperatively in teams where they collaborate to achieve collective goals. Collaborative work minimizes inefficiencies due to different parts of the organization working at cross purposes or duplicating efforts. By pooling a variety of expertise, collaboration often maximizes quality and efficiency in problem-solving. Collaborative organization is particularly necessary in the field of education, plagued as it is by goal confusion and the absence of clearly effective technologies. The emphasis on collaborative organization is evident in strategies such as reducing school size, organizing teachers and students into teams and families, "case management" to coordinate diverse sources of help for at-risk students, the use of quality circles, and reaching decisions through consensus.

Principles of collaborative organization address the linkage problem within organizations like schools, but they can also be extended to issues of linkage between organizations. Examples include efforts to create partnerships between businesses and schools, between universities and schools, and forming even broader community collaboratives to harness diverse community resources (Wehlage et al, in press). Attempts to coordinate and link separate organizations may be grounded in visions of a new collaborative organization, but the success of inter-organizational collaboration depends much on the extent to which political, legal and economic factors support organizational independence versus interdependence. A technically collaborative organization is particularly effective when guided by the ethos of moral community.

In my view, these ideas are the most powerful pillars of restructuring "theory" to date. They are powerful, not because they have been proven empirically to work, but because, along with the agenda for powerful content, they help to explain why so many schools that seem to be well-organized and that sponsor diverse kinds of innovation, actually fail their students. Unfortunately, this theory does not take us very far in understanding how to link the many factors that affect the content agenda. The theory says essentially that if policy bodies external to the school provide high standards, high incentives/stakes, local empowerment, and support for developing collaborative school organization, then everything else will fall into place.

Where will high quality curriculum materials and tests come from? Who will supply high quality staff development? Where will better new teachers come from? How will school bureaucracies be transformed into moral communities? The theory seems to suggest

that if constituents in individual schools are motivated by high incentives to reach high standards, have sufficient control over their affairs, and are organized collaboratively, they will develop their own solutions to these problems. Conceivably they could develop their own curriculum materials and tests, and develop their own approaches to staff development. Or perhaps the standards will create enough demand for high quality curriculum materials, tests, and staff development that private firms will provide them. If high standards for teacher certification and higher incentives to enter and stay in the profession were established this would presumably supply more capable teachers.

This scenario places tremendous faith in a new set of external standards, in the ingenuity and resources of individual schools, and in the market. But the theory is vulnerable on at least five important points.

- It fails to explain how the new high standards for student performance, for curriculum materials, and for teacher preparation and performance, which currently originate in different organizations, will be aligned. Technically speaking, the states and the Federal government have the political authority to design such alignment, but the actual social context presents numerous obstacles to alignment of these elements, both within an individual school and among many schools.

- It fails to explain how the powerful organizations that reinforce and have powerful interests in the status quo will change to support restructuring. Restructuring theory needs to explain how schools, school districts and school boards, state departments, schools of education, professional education organizations and accrediting agencies, will either be transformed to support the agenda or will wither away.

- It neglects the difficulty of the potential contradiction between externally developed high standards and local empowerment. Generally speaking, the more specific the external standards for student performance and curriculum, the less power a local school has to conduct education as it chooses.[26]

- It fails to explain why the citizenry at large, which expresses high degrees of satisfaction with their own schools, could be expected to generate or reallocate funds for more powerful incentives, for development costs, and for operating costs that schools and other organizations will need in order to move toward the high standards.

- It neglects the problem of building social capital in society beyond school. Unless students come to school physically and emotionally able to see, to hear, to speak, to concentrate and to exert energy toward the mastery of schoolwork, even the teachers and schools most advanced in the content and structures of innovation will be unable to help their students.

What are the implications of these shortcomings? Assuming that the ideas of high standards, high stakes/incentives, local empowerment, and collaborative organization do offer some important explanations for why schools fail and what is necessary for them to succeed, it would be foolish to reject them only because they fail to explain how systemic change might be accomplished. The value of recognizing the limits of nascent restructuring theory is to set an agenda of issues that need to be tackled to move beyond this point. A more complete theory would need to pay special attention to these five weak spots.

Summary

Proposals for changes in the organizational structures of schooling often depend upon common sense theories of human and organizational change, but these theories are inadequate. Many structural changes are assumed to change individuals (e.g. teachers) by increasing their motivation (commitment) or skills (competence). The first problem is that organizational structures alone assure the development of no particular individual commitments or competencies. Unless the structures pursue an agenda of particular commitments and competencies, that is, an agenda of powerful content, there is no way to predict whether education will improve. In the contemporary United States, the agenda of powerful content for teachers should concentrate on a curriculum of in-depth understanding and authentic learning; success for all students; teachers functioning in new roles; and schools as moral communities.

After articulating an agenda of powerful content which gives direction to restructuring projects within schools, the next problem is to consider how to link disparate institutions in the education system to support the agenda. To date, restructuring theory has not addressed this problem directly, but the common sense understanding is that this might be achieved through a combination of high standards of performance developed external to the school, high incentives/high stakes, local empowerment, and collaborative organization. These ideas are insufficient, because they fail to explain how the disparate institutions that affect teachers will change to support the new agenda in a coordinated fashion, they fail to resolve a potentially fatal contradiction between local empowerment and high external standards, and they fail to explain how the society at large will make the necessary financial investments in both schools and the building of social capital.

Some of the common sense ideas that lie beneath the blizzard of proposals to restructure schools might eventually contribute to a more complete theory for educational restructuring. The purpose of this analysis is not to dismiss the movement to restructure education, but to help it by anticipating problems in the common sense theories on which it seems to proceed.

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Endnotes

1. For different conceptualizations of restructuring see Elmore & Associates (1990), Lewis (1989), Lieberman & Miller (1990), Murphy (1991), Newmann (1991).

2. Organizational structures can be defined as roles, rules, and relationships that influence how people work and interact in an organization. Formal structures establish authority for decision-making; incentives, rewards and sanctions for behavior; time schedules for work activity; and procedures for grouping workers.

3. Miles & Seashore Louis (1990) recognize the importance of these ideas as they discuss the will and skill for change.

4. Documentation of problems such as those raised by the examples has begun to appear in quite different contexts. See Hill and Bonan (1991), Ladwig (1991), Ladwig and King (1991), Lieberman et al (1991a), Malen et al (1990), Peterson and McCarthey (1991), Porter et al. (1990).

5. For reviews of research on site-based management, see Hill and Bonan (1991) and Malen, Ogawa, & Kranz (1990).

6. Peterson and McCarthey (1991) show how teaming in two elementary schools failed to include critical examination and refinement of teaching practice.

7. Elmore's (1991a) analysis of innovation in education also shows further why organizational changes alone are unlikely to change teaching practice in any particular directions.

8. See Cusick (1983), Moore Johnson (1990), Pauly (1991), Powell, Farrar, & Cohen (1985).

9. For a comprehensive explanation of this problem see Sarason (1990).

10. I use the labels here only to draw general outlines of dispute, without representing their full complexity and varied interpretation over several decades of discussion. For a related set of persisting dilemmas, see Berlak & Berlak (1981). Along similar lines, Jackson (1986, Chapter 6) summarizes disputes on education dating back to the Greek sophist, Protagoras. Jackson labels these two alternative outlooks on teaching, "mimetic" and "transformative."

11. For evidence on the dominance of traditional views see Cuban (1984); Kliebard (1986); Rugg and Shumaker (c1928). Some reformers considered progressive by historians emphasized administrative efficiency or social reform without supporting a progressive vision of knowledge and learning (Tyack, 1974; Kliebard, 1986).

12. School choice and the "shopping mall" high school attempt to resolve conflict over goals through voluntary membership rather than organizational and societal debate to reach consensus.

13. Analyses of restructuring that develop these themes include Lewis (1989), Elmore & Associates (1990), Murphy (1991), and Newmann (1991). Some nationally known projects that have attempted to implement one or more of the themes into new organizational structures include James Comer's School Development Program (Yale University); John Goodlad's Center for Educational Renewal (University of Washington); Henry Levin's Accelerated Learning (Stanford); Theodore Sizer's Coalition of Essential Schools/Re: Learning (Brown University); ; Robert Slavin's Success for All (Johns Hopkins); Elliot Wigginton's Foxfire Outreach (Rabun Gap, GA). Other national organizations, states and districts too numerous to mention also sponsor projects consistent with these items. For an overview of restructuring efforts see Lewis (1989) and Peterson and Bixby (1991).

14. Elmore (1991b) summarizes six emerging ideas about best teaching practice that call for depth of understanding as a central focus of learning. Porter, Archbald, & Tyree (1990) present the concept of "hard content" and discuss the extent to which state policies of curriculum control and empowerment have achieved it.

15. See Kearns & Doyle (1989), National Center on Education and the Economy (1990).

16. See Committee for Economic Development (1987); Hodgkinson (1991); O'Neil (1991).

17. See Coleman (1988), and Coleman and Hoffer (1987) for explanations of the problem.

18. See Brice Heath & Magnolia (1991); Brookover, Beady, Flood, Schweitzer, & Wisenbaker (1979); Edmonds (1979); Madden, Slavin, Karweit, Dolan, & Wasik (1991); Slavin, Karweit, & Madden (1989); Stedman (1985); U.S. Department of Education (cir. 1988); Wehlage, Rutter, Smith, Lesko, & Fernandez (1989).

19. In a study of restructuring in 12 schools, Lieberman et al (1991a, 1991b) illustrate the persistence of conflict, the difficulties in changing teacher roles, and the necessity of integrating content with process.

20. Directions for professional development are suggested in Lichtenstein, McLaughlin, & Knudsen (1991) and Levin (1991).

21. Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler & Tipton (1991) and Lasch (1991) offer recent interpretations that trace America's preoccupation with individual, private choice and faith in corporate bureaucracy to prior intellectual traditions.

22. Explanations of the weaknesses of technical, individualistic, bureaucratic forms of schooling are offered by Grant (1988), Newmann (1981), Newmann and Oliver (1967), Oliver (1976), Purpel (1989). Bellah et al (1991) and Berger and Neuhaus (1977) explain negative consequences of the division of social life between individual, private settings and corporate bureaucracy.

23. Bryk and Driscoll (1988), Bryk, Lee and Smith (1990), Bryk and Lee (forthcoming) Coleman & Hoffer (1987) provide empirical evidence of the positive effects of communal school organization. Schools can act to reduce alienation and improve sense of community, but the power of these will be limited by the culture at large. For examples of some fundamental shifts in thinking that may be necessary, see Bellah et al (1991), Etzioni (1988), Oliver and Gershman (1989), Noddings (1984).

24. Smith and O'Day (1991) offer an original, useful explanation of the challenge of linking disparate parts in the education system, and their proposal relies on states as the major coordinating mechanism. Their argument is not derived from a formal explanatory theory, nor does it resolve all important problems raised in this article, but it is consistent with parts of the agenda of content presented here, and it has advanced policy thought on the linkage problem.

25. It may be presumptuous to suggest that these ideas constitute a theory. They have not, to my knowledge, been organized and presented as such, and they certainly are not organized into a tight web of logical relationships. But even without explicit scholarly presentation of theory, it can be useful to infer the implied "theories" which seem to support specific restructuring strategies. If this sort of speculation identifies previously unarticulated assumptions behind major proposals, their strengths and weaknesses can be examined more carefully.

26. Fuhrman and Elmore (1990) show that increased activity in state policy-making does not necessarily reduce local control. The extent to which local empowerment is affected by externally mandated standards varies according to the nature of the standards, how they align with prior local preferences, and other contextual features.